

Afghanistan

January 1989

Background: Nine years of Soviet occupation have devastated Afghanistan. Since the Soviets invaded in December 1979, some 1 million Afghans have been killed, more than 5 million have fled their country, hundreds of thousands have become homeless, and thousands have been imprisoned for their political beliefs. The war has cost the Soviet Union more than 13,000 dead, 35,000 wounded, billions of rubles, and great loss in prestige and credibility.

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on the pretext that a friendly government had requested its help to counter an externally supported insurrection. In fact, Moscow intervened to prevent the imminent collapse of an unpopular Marxist regime led by Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, who in September 1979 had murdered his predecessor and party rival Noor Mohammed Taraki. Taraki had seized power in a bloody April 1978 coup. At the time of their invasion, the Soviets killed Amin and replaced him with Babrak Karmal. He, in turn, was replaced in May 1986 by former Afghan secret police chief Najibullah. After the 1978 coup, the Afghan resistance ("mujahidin") emerged in spontaneous and nationwide reaction against Marxist-style "reforms" that offended the deeply felt Islamic sensitivities of the Afghans.

Finally realizing that it could not prevail in the face of a determined and growing Afghan resistance, the Soviet Union made the decision to end its misadventure in Afghanistan. Under the Geneva accords concluded on April 14, 1988, Moscow committed itself to withdrawing half of its estimated 115,000-120,000 troops in Afghanistan by August 15, 1988, and the remainder by February 15, 1989. Essentially the Soviets met the August 15 deadline and are proceeding to complete their February 15 withdrawals on time. With the completion of the withdrawals in view, and the deterioration of the security situation, most embassies in Kabul, including the US Embassy, have withdrawn their personnel.

The Afghan resistance: The past year has seen greater resistance coordination on the battlefield and increased attention to political issues. An unprecedented number of resistance victories vividly exposed the weak core of the Kabul regime. By the end of the year, Kabul could not claim to have increased control anywhere. Qandahar and Jalalabad, Afghanistan's second and third largest cities, were under heavy resistance pressure and the strategic Panjshir Valley was in total resistance control, as were at least five provincial capitals. The resistance, however, generally avoided taking urban centers because of concern over Soviet reprisal attacks against civilian populations.

Resistance political thinking has evolved during the year. In February, the seven-party resistance alliance announced creation of an interim government--including a head of state and cabinet--but it lacked a popular mandate and a territorial base and was unable to assume governing authority. Later in the year, the alliance proposed

establishment of a "shura" (council) composed of representatives who would choose an interim government which would form a permanent government within 1 year. According to the latest formulation, a consultative council would be formed comprising representatives of the mujahidin, refugees, emigres, tribal leaders, intellectuals, and "good Muslims from Kabul," that is, those not members of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan but possibly associated with the regime.

Soviet policy: On February 8, 1987, General Secretary Gorbachev announced Moscow's decision to withdraw Soviet military forces from Afghanistan. The statement climaxed a long and difficult decisionmaking process that had taken almost 3 years. The Soviet leadership recognized that there could be no military solution in Afghanistan without a massive increase in their military commitment, which they were unwilling to undertake. Domestically, the war had aggravated economic and social strains, and mounting casualties had led to widespread popular dismay. By withdrawing, Moscow also hoped to burnish its international image, including improving its relations with the US, other Western countries, China, and the Islamic world.

As the February 15, 1989, deadline drew closer, Moscow stepped up its efforts toward achieving a political solution. In a major departure from previous policy, First Deputy Foreign Minister Yuli Vorontsov met with resistance representatives in Saudi Arabia in December 1988 to begin a dialogue. The two sides met again in January 1989 in Islamabad. The direct talks have been deadlocked over whether the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan should have a role in a future government. The Soviets insisted on such a role while the resistance rejected the idea.

US policy: The US has clearly stated that the prompt and complete withdrawal of Soviet troops is the single most important factor in resolving the Afghanistan crisis. In this regard, the withdrawal of Soviet troops will help set the stage for the return of the refugees to a free, sovereign, and nonaligned Afghanistan where the Afghan people may decide their own future free from outside interference.

The US regards direct Soviet-mujahidin talks as a positive development and supports a peaceful settlement involving genuine Afghan self-determination. The form of a future government and the procedures for choosing it are for the Afghans themselves to decide. The US backs no parties or individuals in this process.

The US supports the UN as it prepares for the task of resettling the more than 5 million Afghan refugees and subsequent national reconstruction. From 1980 to 1988, the US Government provided about \$750 million in humanitarian aid for the Afghans through multilateral and bilateral channels. These funds have helped provide food, health care, housing, education, and vocational training. In fiscal year 1989, the US will provide an additional \$150 million in aid.